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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000514

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SUBJECT: AZIZ' NEW GOVERNMENT "NOT BAD"

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NOUAKCHOTT 00000514 002.2 OF 003

15. (C) A TEMPORARY GOVERNMENT: Many suspect this government is not a permanent one. They expect Aziz will appoint new ministers in the next two years, particularly as his political party UPR becomes stronger. LES believe that once the party becomes more established; the government will be more representative of the party.

16. (C) NEW FACES WITH TIES TO THE OLD GUARD: Most of the appointees are new figures; individuals who had never previously been ministers. Even the nine ministers that were reappointed only started serving as ministers during the period following the coup. In this respect, Aziz fulfilled his promise of excluding the old political elite. Nevertheless, LES highlighted that "some of the faces are not so new" as they have close ties to old political figures. Foreign Minister Naha Mint Mouknass' father, for example, was an influential foreign minister and diplomat under Maaouiya Ould Taya. LES identified two kinds of appointees: the political ones, like Mint Mouknass, and the technocrats like the Minister of the Interior who knows the ministry well and has served as wali in numerous occasions. Other political appointees include Minister of Health Cheikh El Moctar Ould Horma Ould Babana (whose father, the first Mauritanian deputy to the French National Assembly, had close ties to Morocco); Minister of Elementary Education Ahmedou Ould Iday Ould Mohamed Radhi (from the Assaba Ehel Sidi Mahmoud tribe with considerable political and electoral weight); Minister Secretary General to the Presidency Sy Adama (a Puular from the Gorgol, an important electoral region); Cisse Mint Cheikh Ould Boyde (whose father, a colonel from the important Ould Daoud tribe, was part of the junta following the '68 coup); and Minister Counselor to the Presidency Messaouda Mint Baham, who represents the Laglal tribe from Hodh El Gharbi and whose mother is from the important Trarza region.

17. (C) TRIBAL LANDSCAPE: There are no members of Aziz' Ouled Bisbaa tribe among those nominated (with his cousin, the former Foreign Minister now leaving the government) and only one member of Aziz's rival Idawalli tribe. In the past, Idawalli was widely represented in the government but on this election decided to support Messaoud Ould Boulkheir,

therefore excluding itself from the government. There are no members of Ould Taya's Smasside tribe, who are being punished for actively supporting Ahmed Ould Daddah.

18. (C) COMPETENT APPOINTMENTS: LES concurred that for the most part, those appointed are skilled and untainted by accusations of past corruption, particularly the Finance, Petroleum, and Mines ministers. Minister of Finance Kane Ousmane, for example, was Governor of the Central Bank under Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi and did an extraordinary job. Others deemed particularly competent include Minister of Justice Baha Ould Ameida, Secretary General of the Government Ba Ousmane, Deputy Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of the Environment and Development Diarra Idrissa and Deputy Minister to the Prime Minister in Charge of Modernization Wagne Abdoulaye Drissa. The choice of Minister of Secondary and Superior Education Ahmed Ould Baya was criticized as well as that of Minister of Health Babana, who is known for his strong opinions and his anti-Americanism. The Minister of Defense, as usual, is someone relatively weak with no military background. Most of his government experience has been acquired in the Ministry of the Interior.

19. (C) COMMENT: Aziz' new government gets at least a "Not Bad" rating. He has named persons seen as technocratically adept albeit somewhat inexperienced in governance (almost a pre-requisite in finding someone who has no history of past alleged corruption). In some ways, the government is reminiscent of President Abdallahi's first technocratic government under Prime Minister Zein Zeidane. That government failed to implement its very good policy ideas into practice because they lacked the political street smarts to work the bureaucracy. We will have to wait and see if the new ministers will translate solid resumes into good policy, but the Aziz government does have more street smarts than Abdallahi's (the evidence of which we saw in many unfortunate ways over the past year). End Comment

10. (SBU) MORE TO COME: Ambassador will begin courtesy calls

NOUAKCHOTT 00000514 003.2 OF 003

on the new government over the coming weeks. In additional bio reporting on the new ministers, Post anticipates producing cables on the Security team, Economic team, and Social/Humanitarian team.

BOULWARE